

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

JOHN MARTINO

JULY 31, 1991

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1991-13

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #4347-4348

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



EDITORIAL NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for Harry S Truman National Historic Site. After a draft of this transcript was made, the park provided a copy to the interviewee and requested that he or she return the transcript with any corrections or modifications that he or she wished to be included in the final transcript. The interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, also reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. The corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer have been incorporated into this final transcript. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

John Martino and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2000. A grant from Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the transcription and final editing of this interview.

RESTRICTION

Researchers may read, quote from, cite, and photocopy this transcript without permission for purposes of research only. Publication is prohibited, however, without permission from the Superintendent, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

ABSTRACT

John Martino came to work at the Truman Library in 1958 as a custodian. When he retired in 1972, he was an assistant superintendent. By then Martino had accumulated a treasure trove of stories and memorabilia from his association with Harry S Truman as his secondary driver and maintenance employee at the library. Martino discusses his interactions with Harry and Bess Truman, emphasizing the equality with which Harry Truman treated everyone. Martino then shares much of the photographs and autographed memorabilia in his collection, including items from Hollywood stars and a United States President.

Persons mentioned: Constance S. Martino, Harry S Truman, Wayne Fellows, Bob Criss, Rose Conway, Philip C. Brooks, Benedict K. Zobrist, Mike Westwood, Mary Jane Truman, Bess W. Truman, Margaret Truman Daniel, Orson F. Meyers, Robert E. Lockwood, Thomas Hart Benton, Rita Benton, Richard M. Nixon, Pat Nixon, Louis Soltera, Robert Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Douglas MacArthur, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Vietta Garr, J. Vivian Truman, Ken "Festus" Curtis, Jimmy Durante, Jack Benny, Jerry Lewis, Ginger Rogers, Maurice Chevalier, Lorne Greene, Myrna Loy, Jim Akers, Amanda Blake, Melvin "Doc" Stone, Louis Stone, Jack Lord, Desi Arnaz, Steve Allen, Gary Lewis, Phillip D. Lagerquist, John Curry, and Elizabeth Safly.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH JOHN MARTINO

HSTR INTERVIEW #1991-13

JIM WILLIAMS: This is an oral history interview with John Martino. We're in his home in Independence, Missouri, on the afternoon of July 31, 1991. The interviewer is Jim Williams from the National Park Service, and Scott Stone from the National Park Service is running the recording equipment. I'd like to find out a little about your background and how you ended up at the Truman Library.

JOHN MARTINO: Well, I put twenty years in the Army, and I retired in 1958, and I applied for civil service. At the time, this was the only job that they had open was the one over at Truman Library. Well, I was kind of green. I didn't know where it was, so I had my brother-in-law take me down there. So I went and seen the building manager and President Truman, and they kind of liked me, and I just went ahead and got hired.

WILLIAMS: What did you do in the . . . Were you in the army?

MARTINO: Yes, I was in the army. I was in there twenty years.

WILLIAMS: What did you do in the army?

MARTINO: I was in the infantry. I was a first sergeant.

WILLIAMS: Are you from Kansas City originally?

MARTINO: No, I'm from Chicago.

WILLIAMS: So how did you end up in Independence?

MARTINO: Well, my wife's from Independence—well, actually, from Kansas City—but I met her, and I married her and . . .

WILLIAMS: And what's her name?

MARTINO: Constance S. Martino.

WILLIAMS: So you went to the Truman Library in 1958, and you met Mr. Truman?

MARTINO: In May, May 22, 1958. It wasn't even completed yet when I got there.

WILLIAMS: And what job did you have?

MARTINO: Well, I started as a custodian, and then I worked myself all the way up to assistant superintendent.

WILLIAMS: What was your job, or what kind of things did you do?

MARTINO: Oh, I was maintenance.

WILLIAMS: Day-to-day?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: You said you met Mr. Truman at the very beginning?

MARTINO: Right.

WILLIAMS: Was that typical for him to meet all the employees?

MARTINO: Oh, I guess so. I mean, you know, that's the impression I got. I don't know.

WILLIAMS: Did you think that you would meet him that day when you were out?

MARTINO: No, I didn't. And I was surprised that I got the job, because coming from where I come from, you know, I consider myself very lucky.

WILLIAMS: What was he like that first day?

MARTINO: Oh, wonderful. He talked nice. He talked to me just like you and I talking.

WILLIAMS: So how long did you work at the Truman Library?

MARTINO: I worked over there sixteen years, and I retired on disability.

WILLIAMS: In 1970 . . . ?

MARTINO: Two, October 6, [1972], and he died in December.

WILLIAMS: So, when you retired, you were the assistant superintendent?

MARTINO: Yes, sir.

WILLIAMS: Who was your boss?

MARTINO: Well, Wayne Fellows, and Bob Criss was the last one.

WILLIAMS: So they were in charge of maintenance?

MARTINO: They were in charge of the whole building.

WILLIAMS: Would you work mostly down in the basement?

MARTINO: All over the building. In fact, when he wanted any work to be done in his office, I was the one that he called for. He wouldn't call for anybody else.

WILLIAMS: Why was that?

MARTINO: Well, he got a liking into me. I don't know why. So Miss Conway the same way, his secretary. She thought the world of me, and I don't know why. I mean, you know, I just did my work and that was it, but I guess I was the only one they could trust.

WILLIAMS: What was Miss Conway like?

MARTINO: Oh, beautiful! She was wonderful! You couldn't find a better person.

WILLIAMS: So you worked under Dr. Brooks?

MARTINO: Under Dr. Brooks and Dr. Z, Dr. Zobrist.

WILLIAMS: Both of them?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: What was Dr. Brooks like as a boss?

MARTINO: He was a peach. He was wonderful, and so was Dr. Zobrist.

WILLIAMS: How much would you see Mr. Truman over at the library?

MARTINO: Every day.

WILLIAMS: Every day?

MARTINO: Every day. Yes, I used to pick him up at seven o'clock in the morning, and I'd take him over to the library, take him home at three o'clock, three-thirty—depends if he had some of the dignitaries over there, well, he'd stay longer—and then I'd take him home. But in the morning when I'd pick him up, it might be late, maybe seven-thirty sometimes. Well, I'd go in the house there, and there is a green table by the wall there in the house—it used to be green, I don't know what color it is now—and Mrs. Truman would tell me to sit down, and she'd give me either a glass of milk, a cup of tea, or some cookies, and that was it. Then we'd go right to the library.

WILLIAMS: Why were you driving him to the library?

MARTINO: Well, Mike Westwood, the regular driver, he's the one that appointed me his assistant driver. He had confidence in me, I guess, because of my career in the army and my clearance, secret clearance, you know, and all that. But he's the one that nominated me to drive Truman. And I drove Truman six months because Mike Westwood was in the hospital with shingles, and he was pretty bad, and I drove him six months straight.

WILLIAMS: Which year was that, do you remember?

MARTINO: Yes, it started in 1965.

WILLIAMS: Was Mr. Truman still coming to the library every day?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, definitely, until . . . well, until 1970.

WILLIAMS: Did you talk much about the army? Because he was in the army.

MARTINO: Oh, yes, we talked about that 129th Field Artillery. See, because I was an

artillery man myself. I put four years in the artillery. And we had an old gun over at the library there that he was very enthused about it, and I liked it, and I worked on it. I was the only one that could work on it because I knew the artillery.

WILLIAMS: So were you in World War II?

MARTINO: World War II and Korea.

WILLIAMS: Did you share any memories of those with him? Did he ask about your experiences?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, he asked about the army, how it was, and I told him, you know, I liked it—well, in fact, I loved it.

WILLIAMS: So he was your commander in chief at one time.

MARTINO: Yes, he was. He was. He sure was.

WILLIAMS: And I guess you never thought you'd be working . . .

MARTINO: No, I said . . . I'm very happy that I did work for the man. From where I come from, I never thought that something like this would come up.

WILLIAMS: Well, whose car would you drive?

MARTINO: Oh, I drove my car.

WILLIAMS: Your personal car?

MARTINO: Yes, sir.

WILLIAMS: Not a government car?

MARTINO: No, not a government car. And I'll tell you a little story. Back in August 1966, I drove him to the library in my car, and he had his car over at the garage at the library, so I figured, well, I'm going to ask him if I could wash it. Well, my car has a standard stick and his car has the . . . whatever you

call it.

WILLIAMS: Automatic?

MARTINO: Yes, and I asked him if I could wash it. He said, "Sure, go ahead." So I got in it. I had the driver's door open, not thinking, and I started it up. And I happened to hit that doggone shift gear in reverse, and I hit the garage door. Oh, I was sick! I was ready to quit my job. I went down by my boss Bob Criss, and I said, "Bob, look, I'm going to quit." Oh, I was . . . You should have seen me! And he said, "What happened?" I said, "Well, I busted Truman's door on his car." He said, "No!" I said, "Yeah!" Well, he said, "Wait a minute, I'm going to go see President Truman." So he went and seen President Truman. And that man called me up in that office, made me sit down, and he talked to me like a father.

WILLIAMS: What did he say?

MARTINO: He said, "John, don't worry about it. I have insurance. That could happen to anybody. But I don't want you to be quitting your job." He said, "Now you just take it easy." He said, "I want you to go home and recuperate." Oh, he made me feel good. He talked to me like a father.

WILLIAMS: So did you ever drive his car?

MARTINO: Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: Which car was that?

MARTINO: The Chrysler. Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: I think we have a '72 now. That must have been an earlier one.

MARTINO: Well, I brought that in from Lattimore. He's got that gray one. There's a gray one up there?

WILLIAMS: At the library?

MARTINO: Yes, well, I brought that in from Lattimore's. That was back in '59.

Lattimore had it up in a garage over on 24, Highway 24.

WILLIAMS: Is that a car dealer?

MARTINO: Yes, so I brought it over there. We pulled it in with a tractor.

WILLIAMS: What kind of car did you have when you were driving him?

MARTINO: I had a '58 Chevy, and he loved it. Yes, he loved it.

WILLIAMS: He liked the Chrysler products.

MARTINO: Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: Was it like a four-door, a big car?

MARTINO: Two-door. A two-door.

WILLIAMS: So he would ride in front?

MARTINO: Yes, sir. And I used to take him to the barbershop on Tenth and Walnut, and I'd park right in front of the barbershop, and the people would gather around him. Well, naturally, I had to get in the middle, you know, to protect him, but I'd try to push the people away. And I'll tell you, that man wouldn't let me push them people away. He talked to them just like you and I. But then it got to where he had to go and get his haircut, and we'd go into the barbershop, then we'd come out, and we'd get in the car, and I'd bring him back to the library and then pick him up and take him home.

WILLIAMS: So he'd go all the way downtown Kansas City?

MARTINO: Yes, sir, on Tenth and Walnut.

WILLIAMS: Why would he go all the way down there for a haircut?

MARTINO: Well, the reason why he went down there, because the barber used to be in

the service with him at one time. I think his name was Sam, I don't remember, but that was his . . . He was in the army with . . .

WILLIAMS: So what other kind of trips would you take him?

MARTINO: I went to Grandview to Mary Jane's house, because he used to bring her medication every three weeks.

WILLIAMS: He'd take that out to her?

MARTINO: Yes, he would. There wasn't a time that he didn't take that medication down to her.

WILLIAMS: So would they invite you inside?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, Mary Jane always invited me inside, gave me some milk, coffee, you know, whatever she had, cookies, whatever.

WILLIAMS: What was she like?

MARTINO: She was nice. She was real nice. Of course, she was sick, you know, but she was real nice.

WILLIAMS: So every three weeks he'd go out to Grandview?

MARTINO: Every three weeks we used to go over to Grandview.

MARTINO: Any other trips, regular trips, besides the barbershop and . . .

MARTINO: No. Well, we used to take him to Kroger's over on River—I think it's North River, I've forgot—but I used to take him and Mrs. Truman. And then when he would be at the library, Mrs. Truman would call up and she'd want to go. Well, I'd take her up to Kroger's there. That's the only store they would go to.

WILLIAMS: What happened when the Secret Service came in?

MARTINO: Oh, there's a story about the Secret Service. He didn't care for the Secret

Service. He didn't want no part of them. When they first wanted to come, he refused them. Then they wanted to give him a car to go back and forth. No way. He said, "No, I've got my own drivers. I will not have the Secret Service." This was back in the sixties now, in the fifties, and then they wanted . . . The Secret Service said, "Well, we want to move over in that house behind the big house." The little house over there, isn't it?

WILLIAMS: Right.

MARTINO: Okay, they wanted to move in there and he said, "No. No way!" He didn't want nobody over there. So that's the reason why they bought that house across the street, so they could be close. They had it all monitored, you see.

WILLIAMS: So would they still let you drive?

MARTINO: Oh, yes. Well, I drove until 1970, and then they stepped in, and then that was it. I think they came in in '69 or '70. I don't remember. It's been a long time. But they tried to get rid of Mike Westwood. There was no way! No.

WILLIAMS: What was Mike like?

MARTINO: Oh, he was a peach. Now, he treated me good. I don't know how outside, but he was real good. He helped me a lot. He really helped me a lot. And Truman did, too.

WILLIAMS: So, other than those six months that he was laid up, I guess, with shingles . . . Is that what you said he had?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: What other times would you drive?

MARTINO: When they'd go on vacation or when he goes on weekends. If Truman had

to go somewhere, I'd jump in and drive.

WILLIAMS: What was your schedule at the Truman Library? What days did you work?

MARTINO: I worked every day, five days a week.

WILLIAMS: Monday through Friday?

MARTINO: Right.

WILLIAMS: Would Mr. Truman come in on the weekends?

MARTINO: No, not that I recall.

WILLIAMS: You say you picked him up at 7:00 in the morning?

MARTINO: Seven in the morning, seven, seven-thirty—it depends, you know. It was no later than seven-thirty, though.

WILLIAMS: So you had to get to work pretty early then.

MARTINO: Well, my work was . . . When I was driving him, I'm all right.

WILLIAMS: So, when you were driving him, the maintenance superintendent didn't . . .

MARTINO: No, nobody . . . Nobody touched me. No way.

WILLIAMS: They weren't upset that you were getting called away?

MARTINO: Oh, no, no. You ask them over at the library and they'll tell you.

WILLIAMS: So you'd be there at 7:00 or 7:30?

MARTINO: Right.

WILLIAMS: How would you drive around? To the back of the house?

MARTINO: In the garage, yes. I'd drive around that . . . whatever they call it, the courtyard, and pull right into the garage and let him off, and then I'd leave my car there.

WILLIAMS: And this is at the library. You'd pull into that circle?

MARTINO: Yes, right.

WILLIAMS: When you'd go to the home to pick him up . . .

MARTINO: Yes, I'd have a hard time going in that alleyway, you know. And I'd park right inside of the yard, park right there, and I'd go over and knock on the door, and Mrs. Truman would open the door for me, "Come on in, John."

WILLIAMS: The kitchen door?

MARTINO: Yes, right off of the porch there.

WILLIAMS: Would he usually be ready and waiting?

MARTINO: Sometime. Sometime.

WILLIAMS: How long would you usually have to wait?

MARTINO: Oh, maybe five, ten minutes, not no more than that.

WILLIAMS: How would he come downstairs, do you remember?

MARTINO: Huh?

WILLIAMS: How would he come down?

MARTINO: Oh, he'd come down real . . .

WILLIAMS: From which direction?

MARTINO: Oh, you mean in the house there?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

MARTINO: He'd come down from the front and then . . . Well, there's a hallway there, and then over on the right-hand side, I believe, there's a stairway. Well, he'd be coming down there.

WILLIAMS: From the front of the house?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Through the dining room?

MARTINO: Right.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever see any other parts of the house besides the kitchen?

MARTINO: Oh, I went all through the front rooms and the basement, and he had . . . well, I don't know whether they were raccoons in there or something. He used to have some kind of animals down there, and we'd try to catch them.

WILLIAMS: In the basement?

MARTINO: Yes, but we could never catch them. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: People from the library, you mean?

MARTINO: Well, me and the superintendent.

WILLIAMS: You never caught any?

MARTINO: No, no, but they swore up and down that there was . . . There probably was.

WILLIAMS: What do you remember about the basement and how it looked in the sixties?

MARTINO: Oh, I don't remember too much about the basement. They had a lot of stuff stacked down there. Gee!

WILLIAMS: Oh, pretty cluttered up?

MARTINO: Yes, it was.

WILLIAMS: Why would you be in the other parts of the first floor? You said you saw all the rooms.

MARTINO: Well, Mrs. Truman would take me in there.

WILLIAMS: Just to show you around?

MARTINO: Yes, right. Oh, yes, she was real nice to me.

WILLIAMS: And you were on kind of a . . . Well, she called you John, I guess. I guess you didn't call her . . .

MARTINO: All the time. Yes, she always called me John. So did Truman.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever meet Margaret?

MARTINO: Oh, definitely! She used to come down to the library, and then down in the warehouse down there. There used to be a big warehouse in the basement, and she had all her stuff stacked up. Well, I was the one that had to get the stuff down for her so she could go through it. And Margaret was nice. She really treated me good.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember any visits with her sons?

MARTINO: The little ones, yes. She used to bring them over to the library. Oh, yes. I don't know their names, but I know the oldest one.

WILLIAMS: What would they do at the library?

MARTINO: Just walk around.

WILLIAMS: In the museum . . .

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: . . . or just all over? And her husband, I suppose you've met him?

MARTINO: I never met him. Never met him. But she used to come down there quite a bit, oh, yes, because she had a lot of stuff down there in the basement there down in the warehouse. She had boxes piled up galore.

WILLIAMS: And she would take things with her?

MARTINO: Yes, she'd come down, and if she wanted something, she'd take something.

WILLIAMS: I didn't know that.

MARTINO: Oh, yes. You ask them at the library, they'll tell you. She had that place stacked with crates.

WILLIAMS: While you were driving Mr. Truman, did you notice him kind of going

downhill through the years?

MARTINO: Yes, back in 1968, I believe, somewhere around there, but he still talked like he was all right, you know.

WILLIAMS: But he wouldn't go to the library as much. Is that right?

MARTINO: Well, no, and then he started slacking down, and he didn't go too much. But he went sometimes, but he didn't go that often.

WILLIAMS: But all through that time, Mike Westwood was still around?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: After he died, did you have any other contact?

MARTINO: Well, when he died we got telegrams to go to the funeral, the wake, and everything—I have it all on the wall there—and we went.

WILLIAMS: Did you go?

MARTINO: Yes, my wife and I and my daughter. Oh, yes, they came down from Fort Leavenworth and picked us up in a staff car. Oh, I got everything from Mrs. Truman.

WILLIAMS: Well, I'd heard that everybody had a military escort.

MARTINO: Yes, I had a major and a sergeant pick me up in a staff car. [chuckling] But it was a thrill to work at that library. I mean, I enjoyed it, every bit of it.

WILLIAMS: As an old army veteran, what did you think of the military funeral?

MARTINO: Oh, I thought it was nice. I thought it was real nice.

WILLIAMS: And after that, did you have any other contact with Mrs. Truman?

MARTINO: No, I retired after that.

WILLIAMS: So you would never go visit her, I assume?

MARTINO: No.

WILLIAMS: When you were taking Mr. Truman back and forth—it's only a five-minute drive, I guess, back and forth to the library—would you talk about things?

MARTINO: Oh, we'd talk about politics, but nothing important. I mean, you know . . .

WILLIAMS: You'd just chitchat?

MARTINO: That's all. Of course, he didn't have too much to say. But he'd get a lot . . . See, a lot of times we'd be late going home because he'd get a lot of dignitaries going over to the library, and he'd be there late, maybe till four o'clock, five o'clock, it depends how long they stayed. But I'll tell you something, if somebody went up and wanted to see him, they let them go in the room there to see him, you know, and talk to them. But if he knew the guy was talking through his head, he'd push them out right away. He'd get rid of them. Yes, we'd get rid of them right away. But he had to have his bourbon when he went in there, in the office. He had a little stand by the . . . As you go into the door by his office there, there's a stand there. He had a pitcher of water there, and he had a bottle of bourbon. And he liked his bourbon. He had a shot of bourbon every morning, but he enjoyed it.

WILLIAMS: Well, that made long days for you if you had to pick him up at 7:00 and . . .

MARTINO: Didn't make no difference. I enjoyed it. Like I say, I enjoyed it. That was a job for me, I mean. When I drove him to the Muehlebach, I got a letter there that tells you just what he . . . If you want to read it, you can read it, and it tells you everything in there about what he . . . We went to the Muehlebach. It was his birthday party, and I was standing by the door, and everybody, all the dignitaries and everybody were sitting down, and he was getting ready to sit down. Then all of a sudden he said, "Wait a minute, I'm

not going to sit down. I want John to come over here and sit right over here.” And that’s just what happened. I went over there and sat right by him. I have a letter on that. Yes, he wouldn’t sit down unless I got to sit down first. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Did you ever drive Mrs. Truman by yourself anywhere?

MARTINO: To Kroger’s.

WILLIAMS: Just to Kroger’s?

MARTINO: The only place, yes. She never went out too much.

WILLIAMS: I guess you’ve already described her. Well, let’s take a look at the things in here and maybe you can talk about the individual letters.

MARTINO: Well, this is a letter that I got on my work in the library from him.

WILLIAMS: Just so we get everything on tape, I’ll mention the date, July 30, 1962. It says: “Dear John:/I more than appreciate the work which you do, not/ only on the lawn but all the other decorations and/shrubbery around the Library./They are beginning to get a good reputation all over/the country and I am certainly pleased with what you/are doing to bring that about./ Sincerely yours, Harry S. Truman.” [see appendix, item 1]

MARTINO: And that’s my police commission.

WILLIAMS: So you worked outside?

MARTINO: Yes, when I first started there.

WILLIAMS: Your police commission? Why would you have a police commission?

MARTINO: I had to have it for Truman, to drive Truman. I had to carry a gun.

WILLIAMS: Oh, you did?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, I was with the sheriff’s, too.

WILLIAMS: So that was a requirement?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And it says—this was in January of '66—“You are issued this commission under the circumstances that it will be used only in connection with your duties at the Truman Library and in connection with any protection to be afforded to the Honorable Harry S. Truman. Sincerely, Orson F. Meyers, Chief of Police, City of Independence.”

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: So you had a gun with you when you . . .

MARTINO: Oh, yes, sure.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever have any trouble?

MARTINO: No. No.

WILLIAMS: And this looks like an invitation.

MARTINO: Oh, that's from the city. These are the citations I got from the library.

WILLIAMS: There's a citation for . . . it says it's a “Special Act Award” in 1966, “For completing a special assignment requiring initiative, judgment, and superior ability to accomplish regular duties as well as accompany, protect, and drive Former President Truman during the absence of his regular driver due to illness.” So this was after Mike Westwood was ill.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And it's autographed.

MARTINO: Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: It says, “Congratulations, Harry S. Truman. 10/27/66” Well, that's great. So you got a special citation from him.

MARTINO: That there is from the Secret Service. The flag I got in the cabinet here was issued to me by Truman.

WILLIAMS: And this says, "October 3, 1978. This is to certify that the flag received by you at the time of your retirement was flown over Former President Truman's residence after having been flown over the Harry S. Truman Library. Robert E. Lockwood, Special Agent in Charge, Truman Protective Division." So you knew Bob Lockwood?

MARTINO: Oh, yes. I knew them all. Yes, sure. Yes, I knew them all.

WILLIAMS: And that was in October of '78.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: So you have a flag that flew over the home and the library.

MARTINO: There it is right there.

WILLIAMS: I didn't know they did that.

MARTINO: Oh yes, I got it. I don't know if they did . . . [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: You may have the only one.

MARTINO: I have.

WILLIAMS: It looks like you have an autographed etching of the home.

MARTINO: Yes. Here's the library.

WILLIAMS: That looks like a Thomas Hart Benton.

MARTINO: It is. You're right, it is. I posed for him, see? He's got my hand on the mural over there.

WILLIAMS: You have an ax in it. You look kind of like a lumberjack.

MARTINO: Yes. See this right here?

WILLIAMS: So that's you, huh?

MARTINO: That's my hand, yes.

WILLIAMS: To the right of the doorway on the mural.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: So you had an acquaintanceship with him?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, sure.

WILLIAMS: He was there for quite a while, wasn't he, painting that?

MARTINO: Yes, that sketch is from him.

WILLIAMS: And it's an original?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: It says, "To John Martino, Christmas '59," I guess.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: It looks like people going to church, an old country church.

MARTINO: I got along good with him, too. I made myself liked. I mean, you know, I couldn't do any other.

WILLIAMS: What was he like when he was at the library?

MARTINO: Benton? Oh, real nice. Yes, he was real nice. Of course, he knew I was Italian and that made a difference. [chuckling] His wife was Italian.

WILLIAMS: He married one, didn't he?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Yes, Rita. Did he and Mr. Truman seem to get along?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, sure. Yes, that's why he got there to paint that. I helped him on the mural when they put the grid lines and everything on that. Oh, I helped him on it. I even had taken the seal off that they had on the wall. Where the mural is, they had a big seal. Well, I had to get in between the wall and

kick it out while they carved it around there.

WILLIAMS: So it was like probably the presidential seal or something?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Well, let's see, you have a thank-you letter . . .

MARTINO: Oh, they are an invitation I got from the city.

WILLIAMS: . . . from Sue Gentry, for your contribution . . .

MARTINO: Oh, yes, she liked me. I got along good with her.

WILLIAMS: Did you have an article in the Truman Centennial Edition?

MARTINO: Yes, there it is.

WILLIAMS: Oh, okay. So they had a reception or something?

MARTINO: Yes, they had a big reception there.

WILLIAMS: This is you.

MARTINO: That's me.

WILLIAMS: You were in the *Star* on Sunday, January 29, 1984.

MARTINO: And also I have . . . here's from Nixon, Mrs. Truman, Truman, and Mrs. Nixon.

WILLIAMS: And they've all signed it.

MARTINO: They sure did.

WILLIAMS: How did you get that of Mr. Nixon [see appendix, item 2]?

MARTINO: Well, the secretary sent it to Washington, and she had wanted to know if he would autograph it. He went ahead and autographed it for me.

WILLIAMS: So Rose Conway did that? Was that Rose Conway?

MARTINO: Yes. I was lucky.

WILLIAMS: You have some badges up here.

MARTINO: Well, that's with the police department and the sheriff's department. Here's the . . . when I went to the funeral.

WILLIAMS: The telegrams, okay. It says, "Mrs. Truman and her family have asked that you be informed of the death of the Honorable Harry S. Truman, 33rd President of the United States, which occurred on Tuesday, 26 December 1972, at Research Hospital, Kansas City, Missouri. In commemoration of the Honorable Harry S. Truman, a ceremony to mark the arrival of remains for lying in state in the main lobby of the Harry S. Truman Library will be conducted on Wednesday, 27 December 1972, at 1:20 P.M. A funeral service will be held in the auditorium at the Harry S. Truman Library on Thursday, 28 December 1972, at 2:00 P.M., followed by interment ceremonies in the library courtyard." Item three, "Mrs. Truman and her family invite you to attend these ceremonies." Item four, "Please advise the Commander, Fifth United States Army, Attention: VIP Division, 2323 Chrysler Street, Independence, Missouri, by wire, or his representative by telephone at [816] 252-8050, whether or not you will attend these ceremonies. If you will attend, please furnish the date and time of arrival, mode of travel, and place of arrival, flight, or train number, and whether accommodations are desired." Item five, "Upon your arrival, an escort officer furnished by the Fifth United States Army will furnish you with additional information and necessary credentials and assist you with transportation and other needs." Signed, "The Adjutant General." That's a long telegram, three pages.

MARTINO: Sure is. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: And then there's a framed thing below that. Is that a card or program or something?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: From the funeral?

MARTINO: Right, and this is his . . . I'm the only one that got one of these.

WILLIAMS: "You are cordially invited to attend a luncheon honoring the 100th birthday of our dear friend Harry S. Truman on Tuesday, May 8, 1984, at twelve o'clock noon at the Hotel Muehlebach Grand Ballroom, Kansas City, Missouri." "To John Martino, from Harry S. Truman." He's written that in his own handwriting. "RSVP by April 8, 1984." Well, when did he do that? [chuckling]

MARTINO: Well, he done that . . . oh, geez, I don't remember. I don't even remember. I think back a couple of years before . . . or three years before he died.

WILLIAMS: So he was planning on having a hundredth birth party.

MARTINO: Oh, yes, definitely. Yes, I got these here from there. Here, I have some albums here. I don't know if . . . There are a lot of things in here about me.

WILLIAMS: There's Milt Perry.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: I interviewed him a few weeks ago. We need to change tapes, and then we can talk some more about it.

MARTINO: Okay. I'll let you go through this. That's the one I was telling you about.

[End #4347; Begin #4348]

WILLIAMS: We're looking at an album of letters, and there's one dated December 31, 1969, from Mr. Truman, thanking you for Christmas greetings and sending

wishes for happy holidays. An engraved card. I don't know what date that was.

MARTINO: I don't know what date that was.

WILLIAMS: Maybe 1970 or so. It says, "Mr. and Mrs. Harry S. Truman appreciate your holiday greetings and extend to you their very best wishes for the new year." A letter January 17, 1972, "Dear John, Mrs. Truman and I appreciate your Christmas greetings and thank you for thinking of us. With all good wishes to you and yours for a wonderful 1972. Sincerely yours, Harry S. Truman." A similar letter in December 1970, thanking . . . So you sent him Christmas cards, apparently, every year?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Here I guess you were in the hospital for some reason.

MARTINO: I was. Yes, I had my knees operated on.

WILLIAMS: And you were still working at the library?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: September 22, 1969, "Dear John, I have just learned of your having undergone some difficult surgery and that you are now in the process of steady recovery. I sincerely hope that your recovery will not only be steady but speedy, and that you will be restored to full activity. Be patient and follow, as best as you can, your doctor's advice. Sincerely yours, Harry S. Truman." Did he follow his doctor's advice?

MARTINO: Yes, you better believe it. Mrs. Truman took care of that. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Did you get that impression of her, that she kind of watched out for him?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, she always . . . Oh, no, she watched out for that man.

WILLIAMS: A letter, June 27, 1969, "Dear John and Mrs. Martino, Mrs. Truman and I were pleased to receive your congratulations on our fiftieth anniversary and we thank you for thinking of us. With all best wishes. Sincerely yours, Harry S. Truman." A January 3, 1968, letter thanking you for Christmas greetings and wishing you a happy new year. A letter from Rose Conway to William Carnes, the Jackson County Sheriff, attesting, I guess, to your good character.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: She says she has known you since 1958, and "to my knowledge, he is a very trustworthy person."

MARTINO: That's right.

WILLIAMS: "Sincerely yours, Rose A. Conway." And this is a copy of that letter we read earlier about the lawn and . . .

MARTINO: Yes, right.

WILLIAMS: And February 12, 1968, "Dear John, I was as sorry as I could be to hear of the death of your mother. Mrs. Truman joins me in extending to you and your family our sincere sympathy. Sincerely yours, Harry S. Truman." Well, that's a wonderful collection.

MARTINO: Yes, it is.

WILLIAMS: Here are some more photographs over here, one of . . .

MARTINO: That's when I was driving him.

WILLIAMS: "To John Martino. Best wishes, Harry S. Truman, 4/25/66." Was this . . . ?

MARTINO: That was at the post office, when they dedicated the post office. [see appendix, item 3]

WILLIAMS: Is this you?

MARTINO: Yes, that's me. Don't it look like me? [chuckling] Sure, that's me.

WILLIAMS: Twenty-five years ago. It's hard to tell. At the Independence post office.

MARTINO: Right.

WILLIAMS: You're holding Mr. Truman's left arm, I guess, to keep him steady.

MARTINO: Right. This one here is the latest one, and this one here is the latest one.

WILLIAMS: You have a color photograph of Mrs. Truman and Mr. Truman out on the back porch, and it's signed by both of them.

MARTINO: Right, and I've been over here where he has all that set-off in the house. I always sat over there when I was waiting for him, you know, and he'd be telling me about them books he had. Oh, he had a lot of books there, you know, that he was always reading all the time. He spent a lot of time reading them books.

WILLIAMS: So sometimes you'd sit in the study there with him?

MARTINO: Yes. Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: And when was this? It looks like a black-and-white portrait.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: "Kind regards to John Martino, from Harry S. Truman, 4/8/60."

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: That's a good picture of him. And this must be your family.

MARTINO: That's right.

WILLIAMS: "To Mr. and Mrs. John Martino . . ."

MARTINO: I'm the only one that had a picture taken with Truman like that with my family.

WILLIAMS: "Kind regards, 5/5/65," I guess. So you have a wife, a son, and daughter.

MARTINO: Right.

WILLIAMS: And that looks like it's in his office at the library.

MARTINO: It is in his office.

WILLIAMS: And everybody is as happy as they can be.

MARTINO: Oh, yes, sure.

WILLIAMS: Including him.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: This is your retirement from the army. You were a master sergeant.

MARTINO: Right.

WILLIAMS: In March of '58. Then there's the print of his Masonic portrait, signed.

MARTINO: Oh, I tried to get that in the worst way, boy, and I finally got one from him.

And I'm not a Mason, you know, but I wanted one, you know.

WILLIAMS: And you have some army memorabilia here.

MARTINO: That's one I got from the party, from his hundred-year-old birthday.

WILLIAMS: And some wine bottles.

MARTINO: Yes, that's what they had up there, and I also have these here from the party that they had up there.

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes, *Captain Harry*. . .

MARTINO: You've probably seen that before. It has everything in it.

WILLIAMS: That's nice. *Captain Harry* it's called.

MARTINO: Yes. Oh, he was wonderful to me. I mean, that's one thing I can say, the man . . . I could never do anything wrong. I mean, you know . . .

WILLIAMS: Did you get your *Memoirs* autographed, too, by him?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, these are all autographed.

WILLIAMS: So he didn't mind that one bit?

MARTINO: No. That's for my father-in-law here.

WILLIAMS: "To Louis Soltera . . ."

MARTINO: Yes, so here is mine. I had *Mr. Citizen*, and I gave it to my son.

WILLIAMS: "To John Martino, Kindest regards from Harry S. Truman, 11/4/65."

MARTINO: Also this one here.

WILLIAMS: Is that when you were driving him?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: November of '65.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: "John Martino, 8/24/67, Harry S. Truman."

MARTINO: Everything I have is all autographed here.

WILLIAMS: Here's a first-day issue stamp from 1984.

MARTINO: Yes, I took my wife . . .

WILLIAMS: And some tickets to the home.

MARTINO: I took my wife and my daughter down there.

WILLIAMS: That was just a few weeks after I quit work that summer in 1985.

MARTINO: Oh, is that right? Yes, I know that house almost like a book downstairs.

WILLIAMS: You have a Missouri first-day issue stamp in 1971, autographed by Benton and Mr. Truman.

MARTINO: Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: A postcard of the mural. Boy, it's an impressive collection.

MARTINO: And that's the reason why I said for you to come down here, because I had

a lot of stuff that you could look at, you know, and this way . . . No, I enjoyed my sixteen years that I worked at the library. I enjoyed it very much. He made me feel like somebody, you know. You would think that because he was a president that he would, you know, ignore you or, you know, not talk to you or anything like that, but not him. It was always, “Hi, John. Good morning, John.” And if he wanted anything done in his office, he called me to do it. He had a liquor cabinet there, and one day he couldn’t get the door open and wouldn’t want anybody else to open the door. I had to open it for him. Of course I pried it, but I got it open. [chuckling] But he enjoyed it.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember some of the celebrities that would come by and visit the library?

MARTINO: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, Nixon, his wife, Kennedy, Robert Kennedy . . . oh, Johnson. In fact, I was on my vacation in Chicago when Johnson came, and I just happened to come back at the time he came, and I heard about that he was going to be at the library, so I said, “Well, I’m going to go back to work.” And I got it in this album here. And I went over there to raise the flag up. I got there, and I went to work that day, so I raised the flag up for him. See, we always raised the flag when anybody comes like that. Oh, yes. And that’s the flag there, if you want to see it. And this stuff here now is all from Truman’s cake.

WILLIAMS: Oh, the birthday cake.

MARTINO: Let me get it out here. I’ll show you.

WILLIAMS: I’ve heard about those birthday cakes.

MARTINO: Yes, I missed a few years, but . . . I asked Miss Conway, and Miss Conway was the one that says, "Go ahead."

WILLIAMS: So you had saved the little decorations?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Would they bring the cakes out to the library?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, that's where I got it from.

WILLIAMS: Were you only at that one birthday luncheon then?

MARTINO: No, I used to go to all of them, whenever he had a birthday. I forgot that guy that used to give it.

WILLIAMS: Henry Talge?

MARTINO: Yes, Talge?

WILLIAMS: Well, it looks like there's a Hallmark crown and . . .

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Well, there's a Missouri mule or a Democratic donkey, one or the other, a rocking chair, a piano.

MARTINO: And Truman with the flag.

WILLIAMS: Truman standing up with a flag behind him.

MARTINO: And a Bible. See, "Harry Truman." I couldn't get that other piece then. It broke off on me.

WILLIAMS: You missed the S, huh?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And then there's a crown and some birds and all sorts of things. So these are from different years?

MARTINO: Yes. I sprayed it with shellac to keep the . . . That's the only way you

could keep it, I guess.

WILLIAMS: So, if you hadn't thought of that, they probably would have just thrown them away.

MARTINO: Yes. And this is the flag here. This I think the world of.

WILLIAMS: It says, "August 30, 1972, HSTL." Was that the day you retired?

MARTINO: I retired on the sixth, but they had this party for me on the thirtieth. No, that means a lot to me.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember the last time you saw Mr. Truman?

MARTINO: Yes, I saw him in November of '71.

WILLIAMS: Was he at home?

MARTINO: Yes. Then he got pretty sick, I guess, and that was it.

WILLIAMS: What was he like then? That would have been about a year before he died.

MARTINO: Well, I mean, you know, he was just . . .

WILLIAMS: He wasn't quite the same, was he?

MARTINO: No. Not like before, no.

WILLIAMS: The pictures you see, he had lost weight and . . . I guess he stayed pretty sharp, from what I've heard.

MARTINO: He did. He did, very much so.

WILLIAMS: Well, have we about covered it, Scott?

STONE: Yes, I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions about . . . I see in your cabinet there you've got the 1st and 2nd Infantry Division.

MARTINO: Yes, I was with them both.

STONE: And I was wondering, with Truman being your commander in chief at that time, do you remember much about him becoming president, or what . . .

MARTINO: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, sure. Yes, definitely.

WILLIAMS: What did you think of him as president?

MARTINO: Well, I thought he was right, especially when he got rid of MacArthur. I think. . .

WILLIAMS: Where were you at the time?

MARTINO: That was in Korea.

WILLIAMS: Were you in Korea at the time?

MARTINO: Oh, yes. Yes, we were sitting up around the 38th parallel when MacArthur wanted to go across. If he had done that, we'd have been heck to play. So that's why he fired him, which he did right. I thought he did, and the rest of the troops, too, thought . . . You know, because they didn't want to go across that river. They would have been fighting a lot of Chinamen, and that wouldn't have been right. He did right.

WILLIAMS: Where were you in World War II?

MARTINO: Europe, all through Europe, four years.

WILLIAMS: You know he had a license plate that had a date on it?

MARTINO: Yes, I don't remember what it was.

WILLIAMS: It was V-E Day [5-8-45].

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: So you were in Europe at that time?

MARTINO: Yes, I went all through Europe.

STONE: Do you remember the day that you got the news that Roosevelt had died and Truman became president?

MARTINO: Oh, that's a long time . . . I don't remember. I mean, if I start thinking I'd

probably remember, you know, but . . . It was a sad day, though, I mean.

But he did the right thing in the Pacific, too—I think he did—when he dropped that bomb, because he saved a lot of lives, or we'd have been fighting Japan today, still fighting them.

WILLIAMS: Did you tell him what you thought about his decisions like this? Or did you ever talk about that?

MARTINO: Oh, I told him it was great. I told him it was great. Of course, I'm speaking now as an army man, see, but I thought he did right. A lot of people didn't, but a lot of people did. He saved a lot of lives on both sides.

WILLIAMS: Well, you've been in the house since it's opened up, right?

MARTINO: Oh, yes, one time, yes.

WILLIAMS: Does it look any different from what you remember?

MARTINO: Yes, I think they painted that table blue, didn't they?

WILLIAMS: In the kitchen?

MARTINO: Yes. It's just a small table. It only has two chairs, one on each end.

WILLIAMS: Yes, the top is red and the legs are green.

MARTINO: Oh, I see. All right, now, they painted it different then. It used to be green at one time. That's where I used to sit.

WILLIAMS: And wait patiently, huh?

MARTINO: Yes. You know, Mrs. Truman now, she cooked their own meals, not the maid. She cooked their own meals. Now, the maid did all the work, I mean, cleaned the house—I don't know about washing clothes—but Mrs. Truman did the baking. Oh, yes, she did her own cooking, her own baking.

WILLIAMS: So there were other people around the house, the maid and . . .

MARTINO: Well, all I seen was the maid.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember which one that was?

MARTINO: Yes, some colored woman, some heavysset colored woman. I've forgot her name. I don't remember her name. She was nice.

WILLIAMS: I guess Vietta still worked there, Vietta Garr.

MARTINO: I don't know, but she was nice.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever bring Mr. Truman home for lunch, to eat at the house?

MARTINO: Oh, yes. Oh yes. Oh, yes, sure.

WILLIAMS: Was that something you did every day or just . . .

MARTINO: Oh, yes, every day. Well, unless he was down by Mary Jane or something like that. But no, he ate home.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever meet Mr. Truman's brother Vivian?

MARTINO: You know, I never met the brothers. I never met the brothers, just Mary Jane, because we had a reason to go there, you know.

WILLIAMS: Right.

MARTINO: No, I don't remember the brothers at all. Now, Truman had his mother's picture on the wall at the library, but he never had his father's picture. We never knew why. Of course, it was none of our business, I mean, as far as that goes. But that's the only one he had. He had his mother's picture up on that wall.

WILLIAMS: Did you have any contact with Mrs. Truman's brothers who lived right next door there?

MARTINO: No. Nope. But like I say, both of them treated me nice.

WILLIAMS: And Margaret, also?

MARTINO: Oh, yes. Yes, sure. Yes, sir.

WILLIAMS: You said Mr. Truman didn't seem like what you would think of as a former president. Did Mrs. Truman seem like she had been . . .

MARTINO: No, just like an ordinary lady. I mean, she'd talk to you. I mean, the way she talked to me. And I don't know how she talked to anybody else, but it seemed that when I would take her to Kroger's, everybody that talked to her, she talked nice to them.

WILLIAMS: Would you wait in the car for her?

MARTINO: No, I'd be right with her. No, I would never wait in the car.

WILLIAMS: You'd go up and down the aisles with her?

MARTINO: Oh, yes. See, protecting him would be protecting her at the same time.

WILLIAMS: Was she a pretty frugal shopper?

MARTINO: Yes, she done her own. I mean, she did, you know . . .

WILLIAMS: Did she look for bargains?

MARTINO: [chuckling] Sure. Sure, and everybody liked her over there at Kroger's there when she'd go there. Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: Would she come to the library very much?

MARTINO: No. No. And you know, in fact, I'm going to tell you the truth. I have never seen Mrs. Truman over at the library. That's right. You ask some of them people over there at the library. I have never seen her over there, all the years I worked there, sixteen years.

WILLIAMS: And you were there the day Richard Nixon was there?

MARTINO: Yes. He played the piano. He didn't like . . . He didn't like Nixon.

WILLIAMS: And that's the picture you have.

MARTINO: Yes. He didn't like Nixon at all.

WILLIAMS: Do you know that firsthand, that he didn't like Nixon?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: He told you that, huh?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: What did he say about that?

MARTINO: He just didn't like him. I'm not going to quote what he said, but . . .

WILLIAMS: Did he talk about President Johnson?

MARTINO: No. You know, he talked nice about everybody else, but Nixon he wasn't very happy about. Of course, there was a big . . .

WILLIAMS: It went way back, I suppose.

MARTINO: Yes, it went way back. Way back. [chuckling] Oh, yes. Yes, he used to get a lot of celebrities over there from Hollywood, you know, Festus [Ken Curtis], Durante, Jack Benny, Jerry Lewis. Oh, I can name a whole bunch of them!

WILLIAMS: Did you help when Jack Benny was there with the TV show?

MARTINO: Yes, I even got an autograph of his pictures. I think I've got some . . . I didn't have room, and I was getting ready to put these away, to put them up, but I didn't have time to put them up. Oh, here they are.

WILLIAMS: Oh, you sure do. Let's see . . .

MARTINO: Start from the beginning.

WILLIAMS: There's Jack Benny taping that show [see appendix, item 4]. Who is this?

MARTINO: That's Ginger Rogers.

WILLIAMS: Oh, okay.

MARTINO: From Independence.

WILLIAMS: Yes, I can see, now that you've told me.

MARTINO: Read what it says.

WILLIAMS: "Mr. Martino, /How about/sending a copy of this/picture to me/at Carlton House/ Pittsburg [sic], Pa (next week)/or 1605 Gilcrest Dr/Beverly Hills Calif, (later)/Ginger Rogers." [see appendix, 5A-B] Which picture is she talking about?

MARTINO: Of Truman.

WILLIAMS: Is it on the back?

MARTINO: Yes [see appendix, item 6].

WILLIAMS: "To John Martino./Believe me/This is a pleasure. Jimmy/Durante."

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Oh, there he is. [chuckling] Is that Rose Conway?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: "To John/All good/Wishes/Jack Benny." [see appendix, item 7] And that's Maurice Chevalier.

MARTINO: Yes, I made a mistake by not getting a picture from him.

WILLIAMS: Lorne Greene. I understand he flew in on a helicopter.

MARTINO: He sure did, right in the rose garden. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: "To John Martino-/With all good wishes./Lorne Greene." [see appendix, item 8] So they didn't mind you getting autographs?

MARTINO: Oh, no, no.

WILLIAMS: And this is . . . ?

MARTINO: That's Jack . . . Well, wait a minute here. Myrna Loy.

WILLIAMS: Myrna Loy, okay.

MARTINO: That's Ginger Rogers.

WILLIAMS: Jane [unintelligible]?

MARTINO: No, I've forgot who this was. This is Jim Akers, the one that played with the Kansas City Athletics when they were playing here. He was a radio announcer, but he was pretty popular.

WILLIAMS: And that's Amanda Blake [see appendix, item 9].

MARTINO: Right.

WILLIAMS: She has her mouth open there.

MARTINO: She sure has. [chuckling] She was nice when she came out there.

WILLIAMS: Is that her again?

MARTINO: That's her again. That's "Doc" [Melvin Stone] [see appendix, item 12], and this is the sergeant that worked at the library.

WILLIAMS: Which Doc? Brooks or Zobrist?

MARTINO: No, with "Gunsmoke."

WILLIAMS: Oh, I'm sorry.

MARTINO: Louis Stone. There's Festus.

WILLIAMS: And it's "Best Wishes John," whatever . . . Stone? Michael? What's this first name?

MARTINO: That's Louis, Louis Stone.

WILLIAMS: Okay, and here's Festus . . . [see appendix, item 13].

MARTINO: They came over to the library in a carriage from Benjamin Stables.
[chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Oh, really?

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Another picture . . .

MARTINO: That's the picture she wanted.

WILLIAMS: Mr. Truman with Ginger Rogers, and he signed it and she signed it, 1964, August 5. Jimmy Durante. It looks like he's playing the piano.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Tipping his hat to Rose Conway. "Kitty," Amanda Blake, and Doc, and Festus.

MARTINO: Melvin Stone. That's it, Melvin Stone. Okay, now we're right.

WILLIAMS: And it looks like Festus was Ken Curtis.

MARTINO: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Steve Allen.

MARTINO: Yes. Jack Lord. Desi Arnaz.

WILLIAMS: Oh, wow.

MARTINO: Jimmy Durante.

WILLIAMS: Jack Benny.

MARTINO: Gary Lewis. That's that old Indian chief that used to be here. And that's it.

WILLIAMS: Well, that's a good collection, too.

MARTINO: Yes, I try to . . .

WILLIAMS: It's a good idea to preserve those like that in the albums.

MARTINO: Well, this is all insured, too. Oh, yes, because some of this stuff is worth something, you know.

WILLIAMS: Yes.

MARTINO: Of course, my grandkids and my kids, my son and daughter, they think the

world of it. But like I say, my grandkids have got half of Truman's stuff going to the library every once in a while. I've got to watch it, you know.

WILLIAMS: For show and tell?

MARTINO: Yes. Well, they're proud of their grandfather.

WILLIAMS: So they brag on you, yes. That's nice that they can do that.

MARTINO: Yes, it's all right, I guess. But like I say, I was very lucky to get that job there. I just applied for it. Of course, I had ten points. I was a wounded veteran and I had ten points, and I beat the others out of the job, so . . . which I was happy about.

WILLIAMS: And it sounds like you did a good job.

MARTINO: Oh, I did. I tried to do my best, you know.

WILLIAMS: With all these citations up here, you must have done real well. Outstanding and superior performances.

MARTINO: I wouldn't have got it if they didn't approve of it, you know. Oh, he thought the world of me. I know there was nothing he couldn't do for me. In fact, when I came out, I was living by my mother-in-law's, and I needed a house. Well, I didn't know where to get a house, so we looked around and looked around, and we found one. Then I called the Veterans Administration and they said, well, it would take a year to a year and a half to get the house. Well, I said, "Well, I'll just have to wait then." Then I went and seen Rose Conway, Truman's secretary, and I says, "Rose, I got a house, but they says I got to wait a year, year and a half." She said, "Wait a minute." She went and talked to Truman. Truman called me in the office, he said, "Where is it at?" I said, "It's over on Sixth Street in Kansas City."

He says, "Do you want the house?" I says, "Yes." He says, "How are you going to get it?" And I said, "I'm going to get it through the VA." He says, "Okay, I know somebody up there." He picked up that phone. About three days later they called me at the house to go downtown to the Veterans Administration to sign the papers for my VA loan, and I got the house in six weeks.

WILLIAMS: Came in handy, huh?

MARTINO: Yes. Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: Well, it sure sounds like he liked you.

MARTINO: He did. He did. Oh, yes, because I always . . . I put myself out for him. You know what I mean? I'd go over there, "Good morning, Mr. Truman. Do you need any help? Do you need this? Do you need that?" You know, he liked that, see? But he's just like you and I. That's the way he'd talk. But he knew when somebody didn't know what they were talking about. He'd put them straight, and that's it. But everybody at that library had a good word for President Truman. Of course, there isn't too many working over there that I know.

WILLIAMS: Yes, there's a few old-timers, like Phil Lagerquist.

MARTINO: Yes, John Curry is there, Phil is there, Liz is there in research, and, oh, I know some of them. But ask them how I used to do the work around there, and he liked it. There wasn't nothing I could do for him.

WILLIAMS: Well, I guess we'll let you get back to your business.

MARTINO: Okay, I appreciate you coming down now.

WILLIAMS: Well, I thank you for letting us, and it was a real treat to see all of these

things.

MARTINO: That's why I said for you to come down, because you could see more, you know. To me, I like it, you know, but it's something that . . . I don't know, I'm happy to have it.

WILLIAMS: Well, it's nice that you had that experience in your life. Not everybody gets to do that.

MARTINO: That's right. That's what they say.

WILLIAMS: I feel privileged sometimes to be able to work in the house. I never got to meet the Trumans, unfortunately.

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX

1. Letter from Harry S Truman to John Martino, 30 July 1962.
2. Signed Richard M. Nixon photograph.
3. Post office dedication photograph, 1965.
4. Jack Benny show taping.
5. Ginger Rogers photograph.
6. Jimmy Durante photograph.
7. Jack Benny photograph.
8. Lorne Green photograph.
9. Amanda Blake photograph.
10. Signed Harry S. Truman Library card.
11. Signed Harry S. Truman Library card by Ken “Festus” Curtis and Melvin “Doc” Stone.
12. Melvin “Doc” Stone photograph.
13. Ken “Festus” Curtis photograph.
14. Jack Benny photograph.